



## **Supreme Court of Kentucky**

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### **Kentucky Law Day 2011**

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**Chief Justice John D. Minton Jr.**  
**Remarks**

**May 2, 2011**  
**Chambers of the House of Representatives**  
**Kentucky Capitol**

On behalf of the Supreme Court of Kentucky, I welcome all of you to this Law Day celebration of the rule of law. The Supreme Court of Kentucky has convened this special session at which representatives of the state and federal judiciary, the officers and board members of the Kentucky Bar Association and leaders of our government have gathered to reaffirm our dedication to law in a free society. As a part of this celebration, we will administer the constitutional oath of office to 160 new attorneys and welcome those women and men who will be charged with preserving our law and freedom for future generations.

Law Day is May 1; and courts, state and local bar associations, and schools across the country recognize it in various ways throughout the first week of May. Law Day was established in 1958 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who believed in the importance of the rule of law and the significance it plays in our democratic society. "In a very real sense, the world no longer has a choice between force and law. If civilization is to survive it must choose the rule of law," President Eisenhower said.

Each year Law Day provides a new opportunity to expand awareness of our legal and judicial system and its impact on our lives. It offers us a chance to reflect upon our nation's constitutional heritage and to appreciate the vital contributions an informed and active citizenry makes to our constitutional democracy. The national theme for Law Day 2011 is The Legacy of John Adams, From Boston to Guantanamo.

Resistance leader and patriot, advocate and diplomat, constitutional theorist and political activist, John Adams became our nation's first lawyer-president in 1797. Just five years before the American Revolutionary War began, he represented the British officer and

soldiers charged with firing into a crowd of protestors and killing five civilians in an incident that came to be known in our history as the Boston Massacre.

Already a prominent leader in the American colonial resistance to British parliamentary authority, Adams agreed to take on the cases and ably defended the accused British soldiers at trial. His role in the 1770 Boston Massacre trials has come to be seen as a lawyerly exemplar of adherence to the rule of law and defense of the rights of the accused, even in cases when advocates may represent unpopular clients and become involved in matters that stir public controversy.

Although each is unique in circumstance and significance, there have been other such noteworthy cases in American history. These cases range from Adams and the Boston Massacre trial to the 1846 insanity defense of William Freeman by William Seward (later Lincoln's Secretary of State); to Sigmund Ziesler's and William Perkins Black's 1886 representation of the Haymarket Eight accused of killing a Chicago police officer; to Samuel Leibowitz's 1930s defense of nine black Alabama teenagers, the Scottsboro Boys, accused of rape; to the representation by Michael Tigar and Brian Hermanson of Terry Nichols in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing case; to contemporary efforts by lawyers to represent Guantanamo detainees in the global war on terrorism. It is important to recognize that the passage of time can bring historical and legal perspective to passions of the day.

The 2011 Law Day theme provides us with an opportunity to assess and celebrate the legacy of John Adams, explore the historical and contemporary role of lawyers in defending the rights of the accused, and renew our understanding of and appreciation for the fundamental principle of the rule of law.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Information gathered from  
[http://www.americanbar.org/groups/public\\_education/initiatives\\_awards/law\\_day.html](http://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/initiatives_awards/law_day.html).